

# Social Intelligence and Counselling Competencies of Prospective Counsellors in Public Universities in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the social intelligence and counselling competencies of prospective counsellors and the difference in sexes in Public Universities in Edo and the Delta States of Nigeria. To achieve the objectives, three research questions were raised and one corresponding hypothesis was formulated and tested at a 0.05 level of significance. A survey research design adopting the correlational approach was employed in the study. The population of the study comprised all master's students in public universities in Edo and Delta States in the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 sessions who had completed practicum counselling courses. A sample of 89 prospective counsellors was used for the study. The researcher used two types of instruments to collect data, practicum scores were one of the data for this study. The instruments used are the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS), and the Counsellors Competency Scale (CCS). The instruments were validated by the researcher's supervisors and one test expert in the Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology. The reliabilities of the instruments were established, using the Cronbach alpha statistics. A reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained for the Social Intelligence scale. Coefficients of 0.81, 0.90, and 0.80 were obtained for knowledge, skills and behavioural sub-scales for the Counsellor Competency Questionnaire. Data analyses were carried out and the hypothesis was tested using Fisher's-Z test statistics. The study's findings revealed no significant difference in the relationship between social intelligence and counselling competencies of prospective counsellors by sex in public universities in Edo and Delta States.

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## **Introduction**

The counselling profession needs explicit education and teaching to prepare prospective counsellors with the required knowledge, skills and the right attributes to offer them a counsellor identity, hence, the prospective counsellors need to have the right training and the expected attributes of a good counsellor to be competent, as this will make them effective in future. In counselling, competency is aimed at making sure that the learner achieves a predetermined and articulated level of skills, knowledge and attributes in their professional activity. One of the central goals of training the prospective counsellor is to promote and ensure the counselling competency of the prospective counsellors (Halinski, 2009). Possessing the right skills and having the right attributes are key sources of competency for prospective counsellors. (Kerl et al., 2002), asserted that counsellor educationists have to assess prospective counsellors to guarantee they meet the professionally recognised standard of training. During training, the prospective counsellor is expected to demonstrate counselling competencies beyond theoretical and factual content to become an effective professional in future. The prospective counsellor should possess and demonstrate competence in the counselling relationship during practicum, knowledge of the counselling skills, professional ethical attitudes and practice. competence is “the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served”. The past two decades have witnessed a growing interest in competency-based education, training, and credentialing in professional psychology (Saxena, 2013) Education and training groups have articulated competency-based training models, including the National Council of Schools and Programs of Professional Psychology (Council for Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational, 2009). The Commission on Accreditation in the United States and Canada moved to competency-based approaches to accreditation during the 1990s. Thus, the certification of professional education and teaching programs in psychology is founded mainly on the curriculum’s ability to establish the extent to which foundational competencies for the profession, are developed in the students they graduate. Competence is now granted a separate section in the 2002 revision of the American Psychological Association (APA) “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct”. “Competencies” are elements of competence that are observable, measurable, containable, practical, derived by experts, and flexible (Stratford, 1994) . Competencies are composed of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which, are needed for professional practice. (Peterson et al., 2010) listed three domains of

research competency for psychology: a critical evaluation of research, conducting and using research in applied settings, and ethics and professional competence .

Counselling competency could be referred to as a method of counselling that leads to accomplishing a significant extent of the counselling aims (Kim et al., 2020). Kerl (2002) believed that effective counsellors are those who demonstrate competence above and beyond factual or theoretical content(Kerl et al., 2002). It is the achievement of positive change in the character of a counsellor's clients. This is the result of the degree of competence of the counselling services offered by a counsellor. To be competent is often used as having the power or ability to bring about the result that is desired or intended. Competence is the extent to which a job or procedure is done that eventually leads to greater overall performance. This simply means, does it achieve its purpose? The more constantly counsellors carry out a task properly, the more competent they will become. This embraces the correct use of counselling techniques, as well as prospective counsellors abiding by counselling ethics.

In the tertiary school setting, the work of the counsellor includes assisting students with a selection of subjects, choice of career, how to develop study habits, selection of educational programmes and dealing with individual and communal concerns. Now, the relevant question is what makes a counsellor competent? According to Overholser and Fine in Woko (2012), incompetence can be referred to as a lack of information, due to poor therapeutic skills, due to poor judgment, and disturbing personal characteristics(Woko, 2012). Personal characteristic is explained as personality characteristics, societal abilities, and emotional difficulties. Though all features of incompetence may have grave effects on scientific work, it is well-known that for students, a lot of these personal characteristics are recognised before their training, and others can be changed during training.

Social intelligence is the capability to comprehend people, social circumstances, and social rules and to behave in a publicly suitable manner. Social intelligence includes four groups of abilities, such as situational awareness, situational response, cognitive empathy and social skills. Situational awareness and situational response are both responsible for success in prospective counsellors' careers, while cognitive empathy and social skills are the ability of prospective counsellors to comprehend the needs and feelings of people, interact with them efficiently and keep relationships. It involves the ability to read and interpret the individual's behaviour, mannerisms, moods, emotions, body language, knowledge of social norms, rules, and acceptable behaviour patterns in various social settings; the ability to communicate with others and maintain cordial interpersonal relations, as well as the ability to regulate one's

behaviour, moods and emotions as per social situations (Meghna, 2018) It is the capacity to comprehend and cope with everyone, and to perform intelligently in social dealings; it relates to both the cognitive aspects (the tendency to comprehend others) and practical aspects (the tendency to agree with and have a positive response). Therefore, the researcher can refer to social intelligence as the ability of prospective counsellors to communicate with persons, observe social settings correctly understand them and respond accordingly. It is a counsellor's capability to relate, sustain and form interactions with fellow counsellors, clients, lecturers and others; it is the capacity to develop and maintain positive relationships with others and to get them to work together with one another. Thus, Social Intelligence is one of the important requirements in professional settings. It is the capability to make pleasant social relationships and the ability to resolve conflicts, which is essential to counselling.

Individuals with high social intelligence are frequently thought to possess behaviours or attitudes which make people around them feel respected, appreciated, capable, cherished and important. They are pleasing to people and are often termed as possessing a 'magnetic personality'. Equally, individuals who are low in social intelligence are labelled as 'toxic'; they negatively influence people to feel irritated, degraded, inadequate, unfulfilled, angry, laughable or embarrassed. (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 2000) lack of social intelligence has also been found to be related to a myriad of problems in individuals, some of which include displaying odd behaviours, lack of empathy, disrupting peace and harmony of the society and having an increased likelihood of social phobias that may include public speaking, sharing a public bathroom, meeting new people, talking with strangers. Also, many studies over the past 20 years, particularly in business settings have proven that social intelligence can help individuals to become competent in their job and relate positively with others (Mustafa et al., 2008). They claimed that in organizations, social intelligence qualities are just as vital as cognitive intelligence measures and experiences to find and grow the capacity of future leaders.

Social intelligence may have an important part to play in the course of training to be a competent counsellor; this is because, a prospective counsellor with high social intelligence and good personality characteristics, may be in a better position to become a better professional counsellor. A counsellor's social intelligence and personality are important in developing not only the outer self but also the inner self. It makes the prospective counsellor disciplined, has self-confidence in social settings, confident when expressing his/her feelings and emotions, can adjust, understand and respond effectively, demonstrates a genuine

concern for his colleagues and shows a high level of self-awareness. Therefore, Social Intelligence are essential skill a prospective counsellor should possess. This will enable him/her to get along with their colleagues, sustain cordial relationships, be a good team player and cooperate harmoniously with others. Prospective counsellors' competencies may be influenced by demographic characteristics such as sex. Sex is the biological nature of human beings, which refers to an individual as being male or female. Males and females may have different levels of counsellor competency; studies have revealed that females are more emotional which could affect their counsellor competency. A study by Shah and Jafri (2021) found that female prospective counsellors exhibited higher levels of social intelligence and counselling competencies compared to male prospective counsellors in Pakistan . However, a study by Bollmann and Rossier (2020) found no significant gender differences in social intelligence and counselling competencies among prospective counsellors in Switzerland . A study by Man et al. (2021) found that social intelligence was positively related to counselling competencies among prospective counsellors in Malaysia.

Typical for males to be socialized to be more worried about individuality and restricted more in emotional appearance than females (Wester & Vogel, 2002). Expression of feelings, relationship with supervisors, freely sharing reflections on the teaching process, and the use of relative feminine styles of counselling may be a struggle for the males. Khan and Nauta (1997) confirmed in their studies that male students have a negative attitude towards seeking help from the school counsellor than the female. For most males, seeking psychological counselling is thought to be a sign of personal weakness. This, however, does not mean that the problems encountered by the male students are less than the problems experienced by the females. (Masinde, 2003) stated that most students in colleges experience anxiety and stress because of: examination failure, lack of funds to pay school fees, and pressure from parents/sponsors to excel, difficulties in handling academic work and individual affairs. This results in more male students engaging in alcohol publicly, moving around the college compound aimlessly, frustration, examination malpractices, and missing classes. Obilor & Ikpa (2019) supported the bias in gender; according to them, when a general occupation is given about individuals in work situations, it is assumed by people that males have higher-status jobs and females have lower-status jobs (Obilor, 2019). Some people believe also that females are less influential than males.

However, from the literature review, apart from training and certification, many more requirements are needed to be a competent prospective counsellor. Prospective counsellors

who may become professionals in future, ought to possess several attributes which should include social intelligence and personality characteristics, amongst others, to be able to support a counselling process. Social intelligence can decrease conflict, create cooperation, substitute intolerance and division with empathy, and organise persons toward common goals. Indeed, it may be the most important ingredient in our survival as a species (Albrecht, 2009) . The demand for capable counsellors in numerous places has also placed additional pressure on the counselling professional bodies. Just as it is a pointer to the fact that the ability to make a proper selection of these students in future situations may be dependent upon the knowledge of the expected personality characteristics, which prospective counsellors should possess, it is vital to note that a lot of empirical studies have been done to investigate various aspects of counselling, but not much has been done on the correlates of social intelligence and counselling competencies of prospective counsellors by sex in public universities in Edo and Delta States of Nigeria. The focus of this study is to investigate the correlates of social intelligence and counselling competencies by sex; it also seeks to investigate how sex could be related to the counselling competencies of prospective counsellors. One could say that the competency of practising counsellors and prospective counsellors when they become professionals may be influenced by both counsellors' social intelligence in their relationship with their sex. Prospective counsellors who do not have the attributes of a counsellor may face consequences such as incompetency, unethical conduct, and lack of emotional intelligence among others. Consequently, they may not be able to make the desired positive impact on their client's and society's lives when they become professional counsellors. The success of the counselling profession will depend on the knowledge and attitude of prospective counsellors who will eventually become professionals. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to find out other personal qualities apart from training and certification that could predict counselling competencies, for the goal of counselling to be realized.

The main objective of this study was to investigate the correlation of social intelligence and counselling competencies of prospective counsellors by sex in public universities in the Edo and Delta states. Specifically, this study was designed to find out if there is a dissimilarity in the relationship between social intelligence and counselling competencies of prospective counsellors by sex, in public universities in Edo and Delta States.

## **Method**

The study is a survey research design adopting the correlational approach. This research design was selected because the researcher seeks to understand the relationship variables

have with one another. The variables of this study include the independent variables of social intelligence and the dependent variables of the counselling competence of prospective counsellors. The population of this study comprises 89 Master's degree students studying Guidance and Counselling or Counselling Psychology, in public universities in Edo and Delta States for the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 academic sessions. The sessions were used because the students had done their practicum. The total population from Edo is 54 while Delta is 34 making a total of 89 respondents.

**Table 1. Population of Master's Students in Public Universities in Edo State**

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Name of School</i>	<i>Sessions</i>	<i>Number of Students at the Masters (M.Ed.) Level</i>
1	University of Benin	2017/2018	37
		2018/2019	17
2	Delta State University, Abraka	2017/2018	19
		2018/2019	16
<b>Total</b>			89

**Source: from the department of counselling psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Benin and Delta State University, Abraka**

The entire population numbering (89) was used as the sample size for the study. Moreover, no sampling was done, hence, the data was obtained through a census.

The researcher used two research instruments and practicum scores to collect data for this study. The first instrument, the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSI), was adapted from (Silvera et al., 2001) and the second instrument Counsellor Competency Scale (CCS), was adapted from the core counselling competencies developed by Scotland's professional body of Counselling and Psychotherapy . The Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSI) was adapted from 21 items to 20 items; the item which was not relevant to the study was removed. The Counsellor Competency Questionnaire (CCQ) was modified to suit the purpose of the study. The questionnaire is in three sections. Section A consists of the private data of the prospective Counsellors; this elicited information on prospective counsellors' sex, age and qualifications. Section B consists of the Tromso Social Intelligence scale, a measure of social intelligence, while Section C is the Counsellor Competency questionnaire, which comprehensively measures the competency of the prospective counsellors, thereby rating the competency of the prospective counsellors. The Counsellor Competence Questionnaire comprised a 30-item questionnaire,

assessing three dimensions of competence; knowledge, skills and behaviour. Items 1-10 measured knowledge, items 11-20 measured skills, and items 21-30 measured behaviour. The scale used a 4-point rating format of 1: Very True (VT), 2: Somewhat True (ST), 3: Somewhat Untrue (SU), and 4: Very Untrue (VU). The instrument for collecting the data was validated by the researcher's Supervisors and one test expert in the Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Benin. This was to guarantee that the instruments met the standard for face and content validity. Relevant corrections and suggestions from the experts were affected and incorporated into the instrument appropriately. Their comments, suggestions and corrections were carefully incorporated. Based on the validators' criticisms and suggestions, the instrument was finally modified as suggested. The consistency of the instrument was done by the administration of twenty (20) copies of each of the questionnaires; Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) and Counsellor Competence questionnaire to Masters Students of the University of the Benin, from the Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology. Completed copies of the questionnaires were retrieved immediately. The consistency of the instruments was established using the Cronbach alpha statistics. A reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained for the Social Intelligence scale and 0.81, 0.90, and 0.80 were obtained for the knowledge, skills and behavioural sub-scale of the counsellor competence questionnaire, using the Cronbach alpha statistics. Data from the selected universities was retrieved after completion, for analysis. A total number of 81 were retrieved and used for analysis.

The practicum scores from the school were standardized for uniformity of measurement metrics. The calculated mean from practicum scores and the mean from the counsellor competency questionnaire were merged and became the composite score for the counsellor competency. The hypothesis was tested at a 0.05 alpha level of significance if the computed p-value was less than the 0.05 alpha level of significance.

## **Results**

What is the level of counselling competencies of prospective Counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States?

**Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the level of counselling competencies of prospective Counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States**

Variable	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev	Scale Mean	Remarks
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Counselling Competencies	81	10805	<b>133.4</b>	10.23	<b>125</b>	<b>Above Average (High)</b>
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Table 2 shows the descriptive data concerning the level of counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States. Total respondents (N)= 81 The sum of their responses is 10805 and they have a mean of 133.4. The mean value of 133.4 is greater than the scale-mean of 125 (Mean of 30 items of four points on Likert’s scale (75) and the mean score of 50 for the Practicum Score. This implies that the level of counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States is above average or high.

What is the level of Social Intelligence of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States?

**Table 3. Fisher’s-Z of difference in the Relationship between Social Intelligence and Counselling Competencies of prospective counsellors by sex**

Variables	N	Male			Female			Zcal	Decision
		R	Zr	N	R	Zr			
Social Intelligence	20	<b>.036</b>	.040	61	<b>-.409</b>	.436	<b>1.73</b>	Not Significant	
Counselling Competencies									
$\alpha = .05$		1.73 < 1.96							

Table 5 shows the difference in the relationship between Social Intelligence and Counselling Competencies of prospective counsellors by sex in public universities in Edo and Delta States. From the Table, the number of respondents (N) male = 20 and Female = 61, the correlation coefficient (r) = .036 and -.409 for males and females respectively, it is a positive relationship for the males and negative for the females. The calculated Z-value = 1.73, this value is not significant, testing at a .05 alpha level. The calculated Z-value (1.73) falls within the Acceptance Region of the Standard Normal Curve (1.73 < 1.96). Therefore, the null hypothesis “There is no significant difference in the relationship between Social Intelligence and Counselling Competencies of prospective counsellors by sex in public universities in Edo and Delta States” is hereby retained. This result implies that irrespective of the sex of the

prospective counsellor, they are the same in terms of the relationship between their Social Intelligence and Counselling Competencies.

### *Discussion*

The results obtained in this study are discussed, based on the research questions and the tested hypotheses. The result from research question one showed that the level of Counselling Competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States is high. Thus, this implies that prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States have the knowledge, skills and the right behaviour, which are the major components of competence; they have the capability and ability to understand and perform the counselling tasks in an appropriate manner consistent with the expectations of the training they have received from their professionals. These findings are in line with those of (Oluseyi & Oreoluwa, 2014), who found that counsellors are competent, they are skilful, and have a sense of responsibility, and integrity. The study of Stefano, et al, (2010) also supports the outcome of this study; his studies found that clients identified the interpersonal qualities and skills of the counsellor trainees, as major contributions to their competence and effectiveness(De Stefano et al., 2010). This is also in line with Ruhani (2012) who found out that counsellor trainees are competent. The training the students acquired from their educators may be the reason for their competence(Ruhani, 2012).

It can be concluded that the prospective counsellors in Edo and Delta States understand the counselling process, have a clear understanding of the counselling profession, understand the professional ethics, have learnt how to apply counselling skills optimally, they have developed confidence in relating with clients, and developed the competencies needed to handle emotional issues in counselling among others. This implies that they can apply what they have learnt to counselling situations.

Results of findings from research question two reveal that the level of Social Intelligence of prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States is high. Thus, this implies that prospective counsellors in Edo and Delta State possess social information processing, social skills and social awareness. They understand the thinking, feelings and behaviour of others; they are conscious of relevant social situations, address challenges effectively, know what to say, when to say it and how to say it, and build and keep positive relations with other people (Rahim, 2014). This finding is in line with that of (Obilor, 2019) and O'Brien and O'Hare who found that individuals in counselling training programs possess high social intelligence and perform well (O'Brien & O'Hare, 2007). This is in agreement

because the prospective counsellors have got the right training. It can be concluded that prospective counsellors in Edo and Delta States can fit in easily in social situations, they can easily understand people, they feel comfortable around people, can easily predict other people's behaviour, and build new relationships, among others.

Hypothesis one which states 'there is no significant difference in the relationship between social intelligence and counselling competencies of prospective counsellors by sex in public universities in Edo and Delta States' is retained. The outcome of this study shows that irrespective of the sex of the prospective counsellors, they are the same in terms of their relationship between their social intelligence and counselling competencies. The reason could be that both sex is exposed to the same environment and culture. This is in agreement with the work of (Rathod, 2017) the result showed that there was no significant difference between boys and girls in social intelligence and personality. The results of this study are also in agreement with the study carried out by Bollmann and Rossier who found no significant gender differences in social intelligence and counselling competencies among prospective counsellors in Switzerland. This is also in line with Goswami, 2018 whose findings revealed that the social intelligence level of employees does not vary about gender. This is also in agreement with the studies of Birknerova et. al. (2013) who found that social intelligence does not differ between male and female teachers(Zuzana Birknerová et al., 2013).

## **Conclusion**

Given the outcome of this study, the researcher concluded that: prospective counsellors in public universities in Edo and Delta States are competent and socially intelligent. This implies that they will eventually become effective professional counsellors. Social intelligence is a significant predictor of counselling competencies of prospective counsellors in public universities in the Edo and Delta States. This implies that for prospective counsellors to be competent, they must possess these classes of abilities 'social skills, situational awareness, cognitive empathy and situational response' there is no significant difference in the relationship between social intelligence and counselling competencies of prospective counsellors by sex in public universities in Edo and Delta States. This implies that irrespective of the sex of the prospective counsellor, they are the same in terms of the relationship between their Social Intelligence and Counselling Competencies.

Based on the results of this study, Prospective counsellors should be involved in adequate and appropriate simulation exercises required to inculcate in them high social intelligence, as it enhances their competence in counselling practice. Social intelligence should be introduced into the postgraduate counselling curriculum, as it has been proven to predict counselling competencies. it is

recommended that this study proves to be significantly important for the Nation, to prepare the prospective counsellors, not only with high abilities in intellectual astuteness but also in enhancing the aspect of social intelligence as part of the crucial components of their lives and careers.

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